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SUBJECT: NAXALITES AND SYMPATHIZERS ENCOURAGED BY NEPAL
EVENTS - HAVE BIG PLANS FOR INDIA

REF: A. 04 CHENNAI 1395

[1](#)B. CHENNAI 120

Classified By: DCM Robert O. Blake, Jr., Reason 1.5 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a reflection of India's mounting concern about internal disorder, Defense Minister Pranab Mukherjee recently described India's Naxalite insurgency as "the gravest threat to our internal security." This worry is also reflected in the stern GOI reaction to the coup in Nepal, with the GOI attributing the September 2004 merger of a once disparate Naxalite movement into the Communist Party of India (Maoist) in part to Maoist gains in recent years in Nepal. Named after the West Bengal village of Naxalbari, where peasants revolted in May 1967, Naxalite strategy is to create a "revolutionary corridor" from Nepal southward and extending across eight states, followed by a "Compact Revolutionary Zone (CRZ)" that they can control and administer, and finally, a Maoist state in this area. While Naxalite violence has spread into 15 states in Central and Eastern India, the level of violence has not increased dramatically, with the GOI reporting roughly the same number of deaths (500) in 2004 as in 2003. Naxalites have taken root in regions ruled by a nexus of organized criminals and corrupt politicians, where governance is poor and poverty and injustice endemic. Indian experts note that Naxalism tends to find favor among peasants in agricultural areas suffering from "extreme distress," which suggests that the movement's potential to spread may be limited. The GOI sees increased development assistance and law enforcement action as the keys to a solution, but cannot succeed until the police and local politicians radically change their approach to governance. In addition, the GOI has only recently focused on Naxalism, as the previous National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government made "Islamic terrorism" its top priority. The mainstream Communists would like to absorb the Naxalites, whose leaders have thus far rejected this possibility on the grounds that Congress long ago coopted the Communists into supporting economic reform. Naxalites have attacked at least one affiliate of a US corporation (Coca Cola), but not American citizens. End Summary.

What is a Naxalite?

[1](#)2. (U) The Naxalites view themselves as a historical movement with a long-term vision, and both short-term and strategic goals. For the present, they are bent on securing a base in India's remote areas, but hope to carry out a revolution in all of India that will result in the establishment of a "People's Republic." The Naxalite movement was an attempt by young Indian Communists in the late 1960's to renew the Communist movement, which they charged was being coopted into mainstream politics. Its name comes from a peasant movement which started in the village of Naxalbari in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal in May 1967, and formally began in 1969 when activists formed the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).

[1](#)3. (U) The CPI(ML) concluded that a traditional Marxist revolution based on an urban proletariat could not take place in India, as it is largely a agrarian, pre-Industrial society. The party's ideology instead sought to create a peasant movement focusing on land reform and agricultural issues, and its largely urban proponents fanned out to remote areas of Bihar and Andhra Pradesh to organize. The CPI(ML) quickly fragmented into factions, as leaders developed ideological differences and broke away to form their own groups, some of which turned to violent insurgency. Once fighters reach the age of 45, they are urged to surrender, gain amnesty and work above ground to support the younger fighters.

[1](#)4. (U) GOI and Indian press accounts assert that Naxalite influence has increased dramatically in the past year, with Defense Minister Pranab Mukherjee recently describing the Naxalite insurgency as "the gravest threat to India's internal security." A GOI intelligence report leaked to the press in January claimed that as of September 2004, Naxalites were active in 156 districts in 13 states, and by February 2005 this had reportedly expanded to 170 districts in 15 states, although evidence is difficult to verify. There are purportedly 35 active Naxalite groups in India, although only 12 engage in political violence. The GOI estimated that approximately 6,000 persons have been killed in the Naxalite

insurgency in the past 10 years. With a well-established support base in some areas, the Naxalites have in some instances negotiated unofficial cease-fires with political parties, which allow them to operate freely without fear of police intervention.

Military Capabilities

15. (C) Although they can gather up to company strength (150 cadres) to conduct attacks, the Naxalites usually operate at the squad level (15 cadres). Their combat with Indian security forces has been restricted to classic small infantry encounters, relying primarily on concentration of superior forces, attacking at a time and place of their choosing, and use of surprise and ambushes, to overcome the military superiority of the enemy. GOI and Indian think tank reports verify that Indian Naxalites do not receive weapons from abroad. They have determined that while the Naxalites have armorers that manufacture and repair weapons, their principal source remains the Indian security forces and the local arms market. At present they rely on infantry weapons, including some automatic weapons, but have begun to construct crude indirect fire weapons (mortars), which are inaccurate and of little military value.

16. (C) The biggest upgrade in Naxalite military capabilities has been the integration of Claymore mines into their attacks. The most spectacular use of Claymores was on October 1, 2003, when Naxalites attempted to assassinate AP Chief Minister Chandrababa Naidu with a simultaneous detonation of up to nine mines. Since the Naidu attack, Naxalites have used Claymores several times to kill up to eight policemen at a time by detonating the mines under their vehicles as they travel along rural roads. Indian analysts have hypothesized that the Naxalites are acquiring the mines and training in their use from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but have not presented verifiable proof to back up this assertion. Naxalite groups have repeatedly oppose the presence of American multinationals in India and have targeted their facilities for attack, most notably an attack on a Coca Cola bottling plant. However, they have not threatened American citizens or conducted attacks against them.

Nepal as Inspiration

17. (U) The "Peoples' War success" of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) inspired India's Naxalites to restructure their organizations on the Nepalese pattern. The main tenets of the CPN (Maoist) ideology and its relationship to India were outlined in an extensive interview conducted by American Communist journalist Li Onesto with Prachanda, the CPN (Maoist) General Secretary on February 20, 2000. (The full text of the interview is found at www.lionesto.net).

18. (U) Prachanda pointed out that his party has cooperated with the Maoist Communist Center (MCC) and People's War (PW) since before the declaration of the Nepalese "people's war" in 1996, and that "the Nepalese revolution is part of the world revolution." Despite this cooperation, Prachanda derided his Indian comrades as "adventurists with no vision." He insisted that Indian Naxalites have fruitlessly spent 25 years attempting to establish a "guerrilla zone," without realizing that this is only "transitional." He urged Indian Naxalites "to seize, to capture, base areas," and govern them, as his party has done in Nepal, noting that this is not possible without "strong mass support." While this interview is now some five years old, it is still viewed here as among the most reliable windows into the views of Nepal's Maoist leaders.

War Against India

19. (U) Prachanda insisted that as his movement becomes successful in Nepal, India will commit its armed forces to counter-insurgency there, saying "that when the Indian Army comes in with thousands and thousands of soldiers, it will be a very big thing. But we are not afraid of the Indian Army, because, in one way, it will be a very good thing. They will give us lots of guns. And lots of people will fight them. This will be a national war." As part of its strategy of preparing for war against India, the CPN (Maoist) has been working with the Naxalites to build a strong Indian support base to tie down Indian security forces and hinder the Indian Army from successfully prosecuting war in Nepal. He predicted that after the Indian Army is defeated, the CPN (Maoist) will declare a Peoples Republic of Nepal.

The Indian Revolutionary Corridor

10. (U) The CPN (Maoist) was the principal agent in the creation of a Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and

Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA) in 2001. The Committee includes the CPN (Maoist), the CPI (Maoist) and the Communist Party of India - Marxist Leninist - Janashakti group, as well as three Bangladeshi Maoist parties and one from Sri Lanka (Ref B). The Janashakti ("people's power") Group claims that it no longer participates in peoples war and has run candidates for elective office. In September 2004, with the reported support of CCOMPOSA and Nepalese Maoists, the MCC and PW united to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist), which is modeled after the CPN (Maoist) and has adopted an almost identical ideology and strategy. The CPI (Maoist) has since expanded its activities to new areas of India in the hope of creating a "revolutionary corridor" extending from Nepal across eight Indian states, including Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Karnataka. This region is called the "compact revolutionary zone (CRZ)" in Maoist jargon. In some areas of these states Naxalites have established parallel administrations which extract "revolutionary taxes," run schools, and administer justice.

The Bihar Stronghold

11. (C) The CPI (Maoist) is strongest in Bihar, where it is active in 30 of the state's 40 districts. The Indian Home Minister told Parliament on December 14, 2004 that Maoists had killed 513 people across India in 2004. Of these, 155 were killed in Bihar. Although press reports indicate that Naxalites are active in 16-18 of neighboring Jharkhand's 22 districts, Consulate Calcutta sources claim that Naxalites are active at some level in the entire state. Dr. Ajai Sahni of the Institute of Conflict Management (ICM) provided a number of reasons why Naxalism has found a home in Bihar. The state is dominated by an unusually rigid caste system in which the upper castes oppress and exploit the Dalits and tribals and violently resist social change. To maintain their stranglehold on power, Bihar's upper castes fund an army of criminals (the Ranvir Sena) armed with over 16,000 weapons, including automatic rifles and grenade launchers. The Ranvir Sena has carried out several massacres of Dalits in the state and is patronized by all the political parties except the Left. Sahni argued that this has resulted in "extreme distress" of the state's tribals and dalits, who turn to the Naxalites for protection and justice.

Life in Bihar

12. (C) A journalist who recently returned from an extended stay in Bihar described to Poloff how the Naxalites function in the state. He maintained that they have a virtual "shadow government" in parts of Bihar, and collect taxes from virtually every business (sic) in the countryside and erect barriers at night to collect tolls from truckers. One businessman in Jharkhand described how he routinely added extra amounts to his contract bids to pay off the Naxalites, who would not otherwise allow his projects to proceed. The journalist claimed that most people in Bihar, including the Naxalites, no longer view the insurgency as an ideological struggle, but rather as a way of life, and that some Naxalite leaders are making a good living from it. The reporter claimed that the Bihar Naxalites do not provide a better way of life or infrastructure to the state, but bring a measure of justice to the poorer classes and castes, in that the high castes no longer interfere in the lives of the low castes in areas where Naxalites are active.

13. (C) Another journalist told Poloff that the Bihar police have long stopped trying to battle the Naxalites, preferring to make their own separate arrangements with their leaders. Under the agreements the two sides agree not to fire on one another. The police then fire off their ammunition in the jungle once every month and claim it was used in "encounters" with the Naxalites. The journalist asserted that police are killed by the Naxalites only when they have not yet realized the arrangement, and insist on conducting anti-Naxalite patrols. Those officers who survive quickly "get smart" and adjust to the system, he maintained.

Bihari Police Assessment

14. (C) In a February 10 meeting in Patna, Director General of Police (DGP) M.R. Sinha (protect) told Poloff that "key Maoists" from Nepal and Bihar are working together. Commenting that interrogations of "hundreds of Naxalites" during the past few years demonstrated increased Naxalite/Maoist activity along the border with Nepal, Sinha credited increasing cross-border cooperation to the growing strength of Nepali Maoists, and their desire to create a "grand liberation zone" (sic) stretching from the Indian Ocean to the Himalayas. The Nepalese Maoists believe they must work with their Naxalite counterparts in India to realize their dream, he stated.

¶15. (C) Sinha affirmed that while Sitamarhi, Darbhanga, Bettiah and Bagaha are the four Bihar districts with the most Naxalite activity, 30 of the state's 40 districts have some Naxalite presence. According to Sinha, the police are well-aware that the Naxalite problem on the Nepal border has grown worse over the last four years, but have only been able to launch a few operations against them. He commented that he had "been there and walked the border many times" and the terrain favors the Maoists, especially because the police forces are undermanned. Complaining that a 2001 proposal to triple the number of police in the region was never implemented, Sinha confirmed that there are currently only enough officers to post one man about every kilometer along the border, and this is not nearly enough to inhibit Maoist/Naxalite movement. He asserted that very few Maoists and Naxalites he had interrogated knew or cared about the movement's politics and ideology, and were only involved to earn money. This makes it easy to recruit informants, he maintained, since the police can easily double a Maoist fighter's daily wage of about 50 rupees (about usd 1.25).

The Impact of Elections

¶16. (U) State elections are currently taking place in Bihar and Jharkhand. According to the GOI, the CPI (Maoist) launched a series of attacks on police after calling on voters in both states to boycott these elections. While Naxalite/police violence has caused casualties on both sides, the CPI (Maoist) has denied the boycott call, saying that the Indian security forces are using the election as an excuse to intimidate the Maoists. One Maoist leader argued that the CPI (Maoist) could easily have enforced a total boycott, but are too busy "sorting out organizational issues following the merger of PW and MCC" to bother with the election.

Nepal-India Nexus

¶17. (U) The GOI also attributes the recent upsurge in Naxalite activity to infiltration from Nepal, saying that King Gyanendra's February 1 crackdown could lead CPN (Maoist) leaders flee to India and join forces with the Naxalites. Local media have reported that Nepalese Maoist leaders are already in India, including Baburam Bhattarai, considered to be number two in the CPN (Maoist) hierarchy after Prachanda, and the movement's ideological/intellectual leader. Despite these assertions, there is no evidence that Nepali Maoists have joined the fighting in India. According to Prakash Singh, a former Director General of the Border Security Force (BSF), "Nepalese Maoists come here, get arms and ammunition from their counterparts and return to their original bases in Nepal."

¶18. (C) Bihar DGP B.R. Sinha argued to Poloff that a Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) crackdown on the Maoists would only make the situation in Bihar worse if rebels seek shelter in India. He dismissed this as "unlikely," however, as the RNA was not strong enough to combat the Maoists, and would spend most of its resources attempting to secure the Kathmandu Valley. He commented that, if pressed by the RNA, Maoists would more likely retreat further into the Nepalese jungle, which they already control.

South Also Simmering

¶19. (U) Naxalite violence also continues unabated in South India, which has been wracked by tit-for-tat killings, as Naxalites ambush the police, who then kill Naxalites in "encounters." Andhra Pradesh (AP) is the only state which has negotiated a "cease fire" with the Naxalites, which resulted in a seven month suspension of violence. The conflict resumed in January, however, (Ref A) after police allegedly killed a number of Maoists in "encounters," and the Naxalites responded with attacks on police, politicians, and property. The CPI (Maoist) asserts that it was forced to retaliate after police picked up unarmed Naxalites, murdered them, dumped their bodies in the forest and claimed they were killed in gunfights. Chief Minister YS Rajashekhara Reddy has asserted that the CPI (Maoist) has taken advantage of the peace process to rearm and consolidate. While the police insist they will challenge Naxalites carrying arms, the state administration, eager to get the Maoists back to the negotiation table, is urging both sides to exercise restraint.

¶20. (U) Noted terrorism expert Ajai Sahni claims that lopsided economic liberalization in AP has increased Naxalite popularity, as former Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's development policies were urban centric and ignored economic problems in the countryside. As a result, many of the state's farmers were put into "extreme distress" and provided support to Naxalite groups, he stated. Nihar Nayak, a research associate at the Institute for Conflict Management, assessed that "over the past five years, Naxalite activities have increased in the districts surrounding Bangalore city -

India's 'Silicon Valley,'" and that "the economic impact of the Naxalite rampage is potentially devastating."

Former Insider's View

121. (C) Anand Swaroop Verma has been a Communist and Naxalite sympathizer since the 1970s. Although no longer active in any Communist organization, Verma reportedly continues to be trusted by the various Naxalite factions and has entree to their leadership. Writing primarily in Hindi, Verma is the author of several books on Nepali Maoists, and is the Convenor of the Indo/Nepal People's Unity Forum, an Indian support group for Nepali Maoists. The works of Verma and other Naxalite supporters can be read at www.revolutionarydemocracy.org.

122. (C) Verma pointed out to Poloff that the CPI (Maoist) describes the current Indian state as "a criminal nexus in which politics and crime have become irrevocably intertwined." The Party has no illusions that it will have sufficient armed force to overthrow the state over the short term, but plans to use violence to establish a secure base and compel the "ruling class" to negotiate its demands. The CPI (Maoist) believes its rural, peasant-based revolution will eliminate feudalism and neo-colonialism from the countryside and capture the cities in the revolution's final phase. It plans to enact radical land reform, break up the estates of big landholders, divide the property among landless laborers, implement minimum wage laws, and end bonded labor.

123. (C) Verma recently pointed out to Poloff that Indian Naxalites have split into two contending factions: The Communist Party of India (Maoist), and a group of above-ground Maoist parties with the same goals, but which no longer espouse armed struggle and "people's war." Verma noted, however, that the above-ground Maoist parties retain their arms and have clashed with the CPI (Maoist) on several occasions. Both factions believe that the Indian state is the principal enemy, but advocate different revolutionary models. The CPI (Maoist), like its counterpart in Nepal, describes India as a "semi-colonial" state that is becoming a de-facto colony of the US and its Indian supporters. However, it prefers a "New Democratic Revolution" based in the countryside and carried out by the peasants. The above-ground parties call for a non-violent, urban-based "Socialist Revolution," led by the working class, and centered around opposition to "Neo-liberalism," which it describes as another variant of "American imperialism."

Not Just a few Peasants with Guns

124. (C) Verma described the Naxalite movement as "very strong," pointing out that it started in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh (AP), but has since spread to Madhya Pradesh (MP), Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh (UP), and Jharkhand. He could not or would not quantify how many Naxalites are under arms. Agreeing that the CPN (Maoist) is the model for India's Naxalite groups, Verma noted that the ideologies of Communist parties in China and Cuba do not apply to South Asia. Nepali Maoists are providing support, but no state provides aid, he claimed.

125. (C) Verma also conceded that some of India's Naxalites are "adventurists" who are carrying on "class war without a purpose." He claimed that without proper "training" guerrillas carry out "aberrations" such as extortion, murder, torture, and disfigurement in the name of "class struggle." In order to gain legitimacy, he said, Indian Naxalites will have to declare "liberated zones," such as those that exist in Nepal, and administer them fairly. Such a move will "win the sympathy of the rural masses." While such zones do not exist today, there are plenty of rural areas that Naxalites "rule at night" and where no representative of the Indian state dares to go.

The GOI Increasingly Worried - Changes Tack

126. (U) Reflecting a series of increasingly worried statements by DefMin Mukherjee and PM Manmohan Singh, the GOI response to the rising tide of Naxalism has been to adopt a carrot and stick approach. On February 7, Home Minister Shivraj Patil said that the GOI "encourages the states to form unified commands, under the respective Chief Ministers, comprising state police and central paramilitary forces to deal with the naxal menace." He pointed out that New Delhi had provided 23 battalions of paramilitaries to those states affected by Naxalite violence. However, Patil noted, police measures alone would not provide a long-term solution to the problem, only "social justice, the removal of economic disparity, development and a fresh initiative" by the state governments would work. Patil added that the GOI would provide "special schemes in naxal-hit areas, especially in

the forest and the development-starved regions" in the next five year plan. This was echoed in PM Singh's recently announced "Action Plan" for the next six months, which lists "Monitor Naxalism with a view to improve the situation," as one of its primary goals.

127. (C) The GOI prefers that the Naxalite issue be addressed by state governments and their security forces, an approach which has prevented effective coordination of security efforts. The repeated complaint of the West Bengal Government, for example, is that the Naxalites cross from Jharkhand to conduct attacks and then return to their safe-havens, and that the Jharkhand government is not doing enough (or anything) to prevent it. The ineffectiveness of this approach was demonstrated by a February 11 Naxalite attack in Karnataka. The Naxalites assembled in AP, crossed the state border into Karnataka, attacked a police station and retreated into AP immediately thereafter. Speaking in Jharkhand on February 13, PM Singh pledged that the GOI "would soon come out with a comprehensive strategy to cope with the Naxal problem." He noted that "Naxalism is a problem Jharkhand is already grappling with, but it requires greater coordination between the state and the center to curb it."

Comment

128. (C) It is difficult to quantify the extent of support for the Naxalite cause in India's rural areas, but all evidence suggests that it has grown considerably over the past two years. This is partly due to encouragement by Maoist gains in Nepal, and partly to the inability of the Indian state to counter it effectively. The Maoists operate in remote, isolated areas with largely tribal and/or lower caste populations that are poor, underdeveloped and alienated from the central government. These regions provide fertile soil in which Naxalism can grow, but are not found throughout the country. Even fairly alarmist Indian analysts concede that Naxalism does not take root in cities, and only in rural, agricultural areas experiencing "extreme stress," which suggests that the insurgency may have geographical and socio-economic limits. While poverty is widespread in India, the large numbers of poor in other areas of the country are more likely to respond to the non-violent variants of Communism propounded by the above-ground parties (septel), than to the Naxalites' calls to violent revolution.

129. (C) The GOI approach to Naxalism has been marked by inconsistency, swinging between defining it simply as a law-and-order problem and declaring it a symptom of a much deeper social/economic malaise. Different states have also defined the problem differently. These varying approaches have prevented the emergence of a clear and consistent policy and provided the Naxalites with breathing space to expand their movement.

130. (C) Naxalism is likely to endure, however, because the GOI does not have the ability or the will to address it effectively. The "carrot and stick" approach laid out by Home Minister Patil has slim chance of success. The strong nexus between corrupt politicians and organized crime in the areas where Naxalites have taken root, prevents development programs from being implemented. In these areas, political parties, criminal organizations, and the police work together to monopolize power and maintain the status quo. This often leaves the Naxalites as the only organized group perceived by the poor as defending it from exploitation.

131. (C) Likewise, security forces in these areas tend to be poorly trained, poorly motivated, poorly equipped, and riddled with corruption. It would take years of training and major investments to rebuild the police from the ground up and shape them into an independent and effective force capable of ensuring basic law and order in the districts where the Naxalites are active. There is no indication that the GOI intends to undertake such a program. In their present state, the police cannot provide the stick that will force the Naxalites to give up violence and come to the negotiating table.

132. (C) Despite assistance from Nepalese Maoists, India's Naxalites cannot defeat the security forces, or establish the "base area" they need to demonstrate their ability to govern. After 25 years of waging insurgency, they have accomplished little more than to render parts of their self-declared "CRZ" ungovernable and to rule the night in remote areas. With neither the Naxalites nor the authorities in a position to prevail, the prognosis is an indefinite stalemate.

133. (C) The mainstream Communist parties favor an end to the insurgency, and would like to absorb the Naxalites or to see them convert their organizations into Maoist political parties. However, open hostility between the Naxalites and the mainstream Communists has prevented this from coming about. For the Naxalites, India's Communist parties are too

close to Congress and its "neo-liberal" economic policies, considering then "deviationist." Naxalites have demonstrated that they have a sufficient base of support in some areas to win election to local offices and state Legislative Assemblies, but they refuse to join mainstream politics as long as they face the prospect of death at the hands of local political mafias after emerging from the underground.

134. (C) We will address the relationship between the Maoists and the Communists parties backing the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) septel.
MULFORD